



FIA Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Today's big story

State acknowledged for accuracy

A group of FIA and Department of Information Technology staff (below) were honored Aug. 17 for improved accuracy in Michigan's Food Assistance Program. They represented all state employees who contributed to reduce the error rate. It was once as high as 17 percent during 1998-99 and was below 7 percent in the most recent six-month reporting period. Gov. Granholm and officials from FIA, DIT and the USDA were on hand during the ceremony.

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Diversity action in Jackson celebrates American history

From Russ Surbrook and Larry Boitnott, Family Independence Managers
Jackson County FIA, Jackson
BallC2@michigan.gov

We selected the month of July for our diversity activity and chose the topic of 'Independence Day - the Building of a Nation'.

In order to make staff aware of what we were planning, in June we started using e-mail to the entire office letting them know the significance of the 4th of July and how it has encouraged the building of a nation through diversity. We shared a brief history of the first 4th of July and the hardships of creating the Declaration of Independence.

We then compared this to another significant 4th of July that equally determined if the United States of America would remain a nation – the battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War.

To honor Independence Day during a July 6 luncheon, we provided a free hot dog roast for the office staff. We also had a free casual day, where everyone was encouraged to wear red, white and blue. The leftover hot dogs and lemonade were taken to the office lobby and given to our clients.

We served approximately 60 employees during the lunch hour. We received many comments expressing the staff's appreciation for the lunch. Also, it gave all of us the opportunity to remember how this nation came about and how a diverse population continues to make the 'experiment in democracy' successful.

“The Graduate” Sanilac County style

From Karen Foster, Community Resource Coordinator
Lapeer-Sanilac County FIA
FosterK@michigan.gov

It was the typical scene played out all across America this spring and early summer: The graduate modeling her cap and gown; family and friends taking photos; the decorated cake; a table piled with gifts; dishes of mints and peanuts on the table; decorations in the graduate's favorite color; a special bulletin board with photos; food and beverages for all.

On July 20 in Sandusky, the scene had a special element. One of **Buffie Gillig**'s foster care clients had graduated and was accepted to college, overcoming many obstacles. And there was no one to give her a party! So Gillig, an FIA child services worker, turned to the Sanilac County FIA staff and the volunteer unit for help.

With a lot of work by many, everything came together at a private room in a local restaurant. With tears in her eyes, the graduate surveyed the room before everyone arrived and said, “Ever since I was little, FIA has been there for me. They are the only ones who have never let me down.” We haven't used her name to protect her privacy and confidentiality.

No passerby would have known it was any different than any other graduation party. And sometimes being no different than everyone else is the most special thing of all.



Buffie Gillig, children's services specialist, and Frieda Fetting, volunteer, arrange the finishing touches for a graduation party that the Sanilac FIA staff and volunteer unit put on for a foster child.

CPS staff explain referral process in Kalamazoo

From Sherry Thomas-Cloud, Director
Kalamazoo County FIA, Kalamazoo

On June 16, **Rob Peck** representing **Kalamazoo County Child Protective Services** spoke to grandparents about the criteria for making a good referral to CPS.

A clarification of living arrangement is needed to start the investigation. For instance, if there is a visitation schedule – What is it? Where are the children? Then, what are the allegations – What's going on that is wrong and what the person responsible did or failed to do and when did it occur? The “person responsible” could be the parent or another adult member of the household.



Rob Peck

During the presentation he said CPS needs specific details: How do you know the allegations are true? Did you see? Did the child tell you? Did a neighbor or friend overhear something? Ask questions – these are your grandchildren.

There needs to be harm or threat of harm to the health and safety of the child. This can even include dental neglect. Peck emphasized that we must always keep in mind, “How can the allegations be proven in court?” He also reviewed the reasons a referral could be rejected.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and at the end Peck offered to meet in private with any participant who wished to ask confidential questions. Everyone agreed that this was extremely informative and all appreciated the opportunity to have their concerns addressed in a direct, respectful manner.

Thanks to Rob Peck and the Family Independence Agency for giving their time to address this extremely critical area of concern to everyone.

■ *Reprinted with permission from Second Time Around Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, published by MSU Extension Service in Kalamazoo County, July 2004.*

News Use Can Use

QuickKnowledge advantage

WaterstradtJ@michigan.gov

QuickKnowledge Web-based courses are offered free to FIA employees.

- You gain an immediate **working knowledge** of the fundamentals that have the greatest influence on overall understanding.
- You complete the material in a **very short time**.
- **Performance support tools** help you implement the material directly into your work environment.
- **Access QuickKnowledge** from FIA-Net by selecting “Agency Websites”, “Office of Professional Development” and click on “QuickKnowledge Courses”. A list of all the courses will display. Click on “More Info” and start learning!

Angel House run-walk succeeds thanks to FIA staff

From Anna Macielinski, Children's Services Manager
Ingham County FIA, Lansing
MacielinskiA@michigan.gov

Ingham County FIA staff recently organized a 5K run-walk to benefit a new 12-bed emergency shelter and assessment center for abused and neglected children. More than 200 runners and walkers registered for the first **Angel House 5K Run/Walk**. Angel House is a community project of Capital Area Child & Family Services, a Lansing-based private non-profit agency. The event was held June 12 in Lansing. Michigan State Housing Development Authority sponsored the event, which raised nearly \$7,000. Plans are already under way for the 2005 event.

Sheri Jones, local television news anchor and co-chair of the capital campaign, gave welcoming remarks. Hon. Donald S. Owens of the Michigan Court of Appeals and a member of the Angel House Advisory Council, ran the race and commented afterward on how well organized and well attended it was. Numerous prizes were awarded including several donated bikes from Wal-Mart, Target and Toys R Us. Panera Bread Company and Lansing Board of Water & Light supported the event with food and water, respectively.

"The organizers really appreciate the support and turnout from the community, and especially the FIA participants from both the local and central offices," said **Ray Holman**, Ingham County CPS worker and initiator of the run/walk. "It really took a joint effort to make it such a huge success." His core committee included coworkers **Colin Parks, Terry Heisler, Audra Parsons, Ted Jay** and **Kelly Walters**. Anyone interested in next year's event may contact HolmanR2@michigan.gov



Run-walk organizers (l-r): Mary Reed of Child & Family Services; Ray Holman, Kelly Walters and Heather Myers of Ingham County FIA; community volunteer Colin Parks; Audra Parsons, Terry Heisler & Anna Macielinski of Ingham County FIA.

DDS staff receive awards

Sue.Rausch@ssa.gov

Two work teams and one individual from Michigan Disability Determination Service were awarded the Social Security Administration Region V Citations for 2004, the highest award presented in recognition of employees that made significant contributions throughout the year.

They received the awards Aug. 26 in Chicago. Award recipients are:

■ The Field Office Outstation Team. Members including **Cassandra Collier, JoeAnne Heard, Janis McGlone, Ella Morris, Leslie Neal, LaShawn Taylor** and **Virginia Lighthizer** were honored for contributions they made working at local field offices and helping improve the quality of the disability applications. The team from the Detroit regional office worked in a field office on a rotational basis with the support of the area director. The pilot resulted in a statewide project that improved electronic submission as we prepare for a totally electronic work environment.

■ I. Levy Case Processing Software Team. Members including **Heather Torrance, John Carelton, Dale Foot, Penny Gardner, Linda Largo, Kathy Richards** and **Robert Sides** were honored for support to staff in the very difficult Phase 3 migration project, an essential "last step" prior to transition to the electronic case folder environment.

■ **Richard Emerson** was honored for his leadership, for meeting workload goals and improving overall performance in the Lansing regional office.

We at DDS are very proud of these persons and their achievements.



Volunteer **Stacey Schafer** and Clinton-Gratiot FIA community resource coordinator **Dan Carley** unload a donation of free books and videos from the Michigan Friends of Education organization based in Gregory, Mich. They will be passed out to FIA clients by caseworkers and will be shared with community partners in collaborative activities for mutual clients. It includes children & teen books and novels for adults. This is the third year Clinton & Gratiot county offices have partnered with the Michigan Friends of Education organization to distribute books.

Date: Aug. 9
To: Don Langdon, Family Independence Specialist
Isabella County FIA, Mt. Pleasant

Subj: Thanks

I am so often in crisis with my son's autism and my ongoing disability challenges that I neglect to say 'Thank You!' You are so kind and so compassionate, you Arielle are a wonderful human being. Thank you for your concern and going the extra mile.

Mimi Lannen

Mt. Pleasant

Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise

Date: Aug. 4
To: FIA Matters!
Subj: Ruth Goldman

Ruth Goldman, FIA's resident telecommunications expert, has saved money for FIA again.

Ruth recently recommended removal of backup circuits that support the FIA data network, which is estimated to save FIA approximately \$266,000 annually. The backup circuits provided very limited actual backup capability and the costs far outweighed the benefits. Previous efforts by Ruth and her staff have achieved cost savings for the Telecommunications area of over \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2003 and \$750,000 in FY 2004. Congratulations Ruth!

Dan Werk, Director

FIA Departmental Services Division, Lansing

Date: July 14
To: St. Joseph County FIA staff
Subj: Imminent retirement?

On July 15, 1974 Mike Conrod and I stepped for the first time into the St. Joseph County DSS building to begin the first day of what would become an amazing adventure. The office was in the building next to the fairgrounds where MSU Extension now is located. Mike and I actually shared an office on the "AP hallway" of the building. There were 25-30 people on the entire staff and we all fit into the small conference room for all-staff meetings every Friday morning. Don VeCasey was the director, Vern White was Mike's supervisor, Lynda Crandall was my supervisor, and Dorothy Pagels was the office manager/matriarch/chief pie baker.

In the past 30 years we have seen more changes than either of us could ever recount. Personally, we've had children and now grandchildren, Mike went off to serve in the first Gulf War, and we've both worked to build a number of helping organizations in the community. What hasn't changed in the past 30 years is the amazingly talented and dedicated colleagues with whom we share this work. You are a huge part of what has made our time here fulfilling and fun.

As a small token of our appreciation, Mike and I will provide a continental breakfast for you tomorrow morning. We invite you to join us in celebrating this milestone day for us.

Margaret Shultz and Mike Conrod

PS. No, we're not retiring...yet!

■ "I thought this was a unique way for these staff members to celebrate their 30-year anniversary with the agency," said Jean Skalski of St. Joseph FIA, who submitted this. "Mike (a FIM) and Margaret, community resource coordinator for Cass-St. Joseph County, are valuable members of the county team. I am glad they are not retiring yet, as they will be hard to replace. The continental breakfast was delicious."

Date: June 14
To: Kitty Sullivan, Family Independence Specialist
Kent County FIA, Grand Rapids

Subj: Thank You

Just a quick thank you for always believing in me. You saw something in me when we did that "goal" paperwork all those years ago and you never gave up on me. You were always there to work with me and support me through everything and, because of that, we earned the Achiever of the Month Award not too long ago. I only wish that all people who are on any type of assistance could be lucky enough to have a caseworker like you. Thank you for all that you've done for me and continue to do until I can reach all of my goals.

Emily Marcellino

Grand Rapids

■ This client had been nominated by Kitty for the Achiever of the Month Award.

FIA Matters! is a product of Michigan's Family Independence Agency
Marianne Udow, Director Karen Smith, Director, Office of Communications
Larry VanDeSande, editor Submit stories by e-mail to: FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov